1-YEAR ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

SKUTCH
SKLUTCH
SLITCH

SHLIP
PWIP
POOP
RRRAARGH

SHRUP
SHLUKK
HHRRRRRRRR
HRFF
NICE.

AND I'M SURE YOU'RE SUCH GOOD BOYS, TOO.
EAGER TO PLEASE.
I WANT YOU TO DO SOMETHING FOR ME. A VERY IMPORTANT SOMETHING.
I'M GOING TO SEND YOU TO SEE A WOMAN NAMED GISELLE.
YOU'LL LIKE HER. THEY TELL ME SHE'S A PRETTY ONE.
ONCE YOU'RE CLOSE ENOUGH, I WANT YOU TO...
...WELL, YOU'LL JUST DO WHAT YOU DO, WON'T YOU?
I THINK WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.
NOW FETCH.
ANIMORA?

THE VILLARD WOMAN COMMANDS A GREAT DEAL OF MAGICAL POWER.
WE THOUGHT...
...WE *ASSUMED*...
...THAT WHEN WE STRUCK OUR BARGAIN YOU WOULD DISPOSE OF HER *YOURSELF*, NOT SEND YOUR MINIONS.
I *WILL* DISPOSE OF HER...
...IN MY OWN TIME.
FIRST SHE'S TO BE TESTED, HER STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES DETERMINED. SO I SENT MY PETS TO HER.
I DON'T *EXPECT* THEM TO DESTROY HER, THOUGH IF THEY MANAGE TO DO SO, THEN SO MUCH THE BETTER.
I *TRUST* THAT'S NOT A DIFFICULTY?
NO...
...NO, OF COURSE NOT.
MY FELLOW MASTERS AND I ARE CONCERNED ONLY WITH HER DEMISE AND THE RETURN OF OUR RIGHTFUL SPIRITS.

PATIENCE.
I WAS EXILED FROM PARADISE BY A RIVAL I UNDERESTIMATED. THEN YOUR PREDECESSORS IMPRISONED ME IN AN UTTER VOID. EACH TIME I WAITED AND GATHERED MY STRENGTH.
EACH TIME I WAS PATIENT UNTIL MY MOMENT CAME.
I'M WELL AWARE OF WHAT MUST BE DONE.
MAGUS...
...IT'S TIME WE ADMIT THE ERROR WE'VE MADE. WE'VE UNLEASHED A CREATURE WE CAN'T CONTROL.
WE STAND IN YOUR PLACE OF POWER, *YOUR* GUILD CATHEDRAL, AND SHE DOESN'T EVEN BOTHER TO HIDE THE CONTEMPT SHE FEELS FOR US.
WHAT'S DONE IS DONE, ZAI.
WE PURSUED OUR ONLY OPTION FOR BRINGING ABOUT THE THIEF'S DESTRUCTION. THIS IS THE PRICE WE PAY FOR FREEING OUR SPIRITS.

WE AGREED TO THIS.
ALL OF US.
BECAUSE YOU ASSURED US WE COULD AGAIN IMPRISON HER ONCE SHE'D SERVED OUR PURPOSES! DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT'S POSSIBLE NOW?
I'D EXPECT AS MUCH FROM SOMEONE ANIMORA BESTED SO READILY UPON HER ARRIVAL.
YOUR WOUNDED PRIDE IS SHOWING, ATYAAH.
MY PRIDE IS BESIDE THE POINT. IT'S OBVIOUS NONE OF US CAN STAND AGAINST HER.
MONDRU DID WARN US. WE TREAT HIM AS A FOOL, BUT PERHAPS THIS TIME HE WAS—
ENOUGH!
IT'S FAR TOO LATE TO LOSE YOUR STOMACHS NOW! WE'VE STARTED DOWN THIS PATH, WE'LL SEE IT THROUGH TO ITS END!
I PROMISE YOU, WHEN THIS AFFAIR IS OVER, WE'LL BE RID OF ANIMORA...
...AND GISELLE VILLARD.

THIS IS GOOD.
What's good?
THIS.
WALKING IN THE PARK, ENJOYING THE EVENING. JUST...
...BEING NORMAL.
BEING LIKE I WAS BEFORE I GOT HANDED THE SIGIL.
Didn't "being normal" for you involve too many parties and too few boyfriends with any redeeming qualities?
NO.
WELL, OKAY, MAYBE...
...BUT YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SAYING, RIGHT?
EVER SINCE THAT THING APPEARED ON MY PALM, MY LIFE'S BEEN NON-STOP TURMOIL.
GUILD MASTERS, DEMONS, ETERNAL SPIRITS. YOU NAME IT.
I'M SO GLAD TO TO GET AWAY FROM ALL THE MAGIC, AT LEAST FOR A LITTLE WHILE.
With the exception of the talking squit, whom you adore.
WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE TALKING SQUIT, WHOM I TOLERATE.

Enjoy it while you can. But there's some stuff you can't just walk away from, like your creepy boyfriend or whatever it is you consider him.
CAN WE NOT GO THERE RIGHT NOW?
Sure, avoid the question. Then, how about Animora? Wanna talk about that one?
WHAT'S THERE TO TALK ABOUT? MONDRU TOLD US THE OTHER MASTERS WERE GOING TO *TRY* BRINGING HER BACK.
HOW DO WE KNOW THEY WERE EVEN SUCCESSFUL? MY SISTER HAD NOUVEAU ADEPTS CAST A MAGICAL SEARCH FOR ANY TRACE OF HER AND THEY CAME UP WITH NOTHING.
Ever think maybe she doesn't **want** to be found out?
EVER THINK SHE'S NOT REALLY HERE? IF SHE *WERE* HERE, WOULDN'T THE GUILD SPIRITS HAVE SENSED HER?
*GISELLE?*
GREAT, RIGHT ON CUE. THAT'S YOU, ALAIN?
*I DO HATE TO INTERRUPT...*

BUT I BELIEVE YOU'RE ABOUT TO HAVE VISITORS
DARROW?
Um
just a guess
but I'm gonna say NO.
I WAS HAVING SUCH A NICE NIGHT TOO

HEY!
SNFF SNFF
MM-HM
GISELLE WE SPIRITS HAVE TRIED TO BE AS UNOBTRUSIVE AS POSSIBLE
RRRARGH
BUT WE FEEL OBLIGED TO INFORM YOU THESE CREATURES LIKELY INTEND YOU HARM
GEE, WHAT TIPPED YOU OFF?
HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THESE THINGS ARE?
THEY HAVE A FAMILIARITY TO US BUT NONE OF OUR NUMBER CAN REMEMBER ENCOUNTERING THEM
ALL RIGHT, THEN WE'LL JUST MAKE IT UP AS WE GO
LOOK I DON'T KNOW WHAT I EVER DID TO YOU GUYS

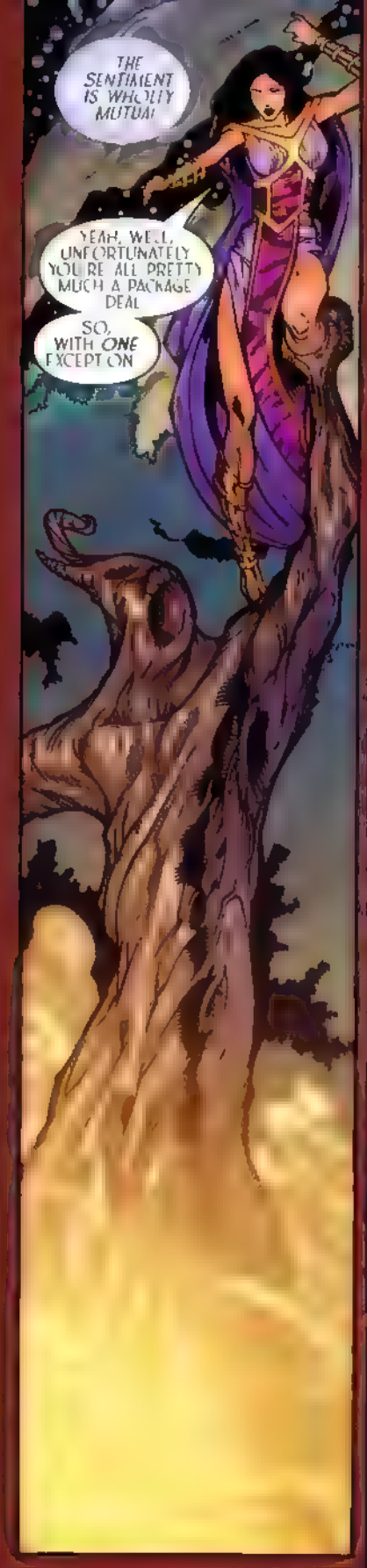
BUT I WAS TAKING A WALK

DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT'S BEEN SINCE I DID THAT?
HRRK
ALANG ANYBODY ELSE?
ANY SUGGESTIONS THAT MIGHT KEEP ME FROM GETTING EVISCERATED?
THEY'RE APPARENTLY MINDLESS CREATURES OR AT LEAST SINGLE-MINDED
THOUGH THEY DO SEEM TO HAVE A LONG REACH
OFFER HELP OR KEEP SILENT, MAGUS. YOU'RE QUITE INGRATIATING WITH A SMIRK ON YOUR FACE
HANG ON, HE'S GOT-
GRRAR

HKK!
SAVE FOR THEIR RAGE AND THEIR FIXATION UPON YOU, THESE CREATURES ARE BLANK SLATES, GISELLE
MEANING THEY'VE BEEN CREATED RECENTLY
WHICH MAKES THEM INFINITELY SUSCEPTIBLE TO SPELLS OF TRANSFORMATION
IF THE FORMS THEY PRESENTLY WEAR THREATEN YOU
SIMPLY CHANGE THEIR FORMS
ARROO?
BEAUTIFULLY DONE
WHATEVER WORKS
ONE DOWN

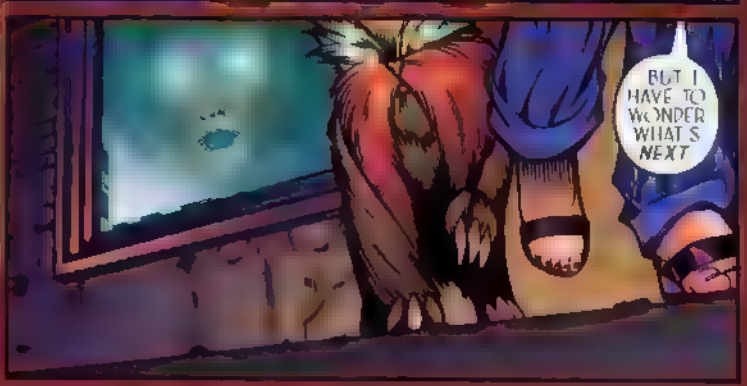
NO, THANKS TO YOU!
What, you want me to stick around down there?
I'll get stepped on
I SHOULD BE THAT LUCKY
HRRRAM
OKAY, BOY
HEEL
BRF?

That's great
That's what the world really needs, another gork
COULD YOU TRY NOT BEING A DISTRACTION FOR A CHANGE?
I'VE STILL GOT TO DEAL WITH ONE MORE OF -
AAH!
WHAT'S THAT SOMEBODY SAID ABOUT A LONG REACH?
AND GETTING LONGER ALL THE TIME
YOU KNOW, I'M USED TO HAVING THE OTHER SPIRITS IN MY HEAD I DON'T EVEN MIND IT ANYMORE
BUT YOU I COULD REALLY DO WITHOUT, MAGUS


THE SENTIMENT IS WHOLLY MUTUAL
YEAH, WELL, UNFORTUNATELY YOU'RE ALL PRETTY MUCH A PACKAGE DEAL
SO, WITH ONE EXCEPTION

THANKS FOR THE HELP
WE ARE YOUR SERVANTS GISELLE
What do you think THAT was all about?

I WISH I KNEW I'VE SAID IT BEFORE MAYBE THE SIGIL JUST MAKES ME A MAGNET FOR THIS STUFF
I'M GETTING A LITTLE MORE COMFORTABLE WITH IT


BUT I HAVE TO WONDER WHAT'S NEXT

I KNOW ALL THAT I NEED TO KNOW
I UNDERSTAND THIS *MYSTIC* I UNDERSTAND HOW TO BRING ABOUT HER *DEMISE*
AND AS MUCH AS I'D LIKE TO DESTROY YOUR PRECIOUS ETERNAL SPIRITS FOR IMPRISONING ME IN THE FIRST PLACE
A BARGAIN'S A BARGAIN
YOU'LL HAVE YOUR SPIRITS BACK SOON ENOUGH
MAGUS? SHE *SAYS* ALL THE RIGHT THINGS DO WE DARE TRUST HER?
IT DOESN'T MATTER IF *WE* TRUST *HER*
WHAT MATTERS IS THAT SHE UNDERESTIMATES US AS LONG AS AN MORA PERCEIVES US AS WEAKLINGS WHO FEAR HER
SHE'LL *NEVER* EXPECT BETRAYAL

CATTLE.
THEY'LL *NEVER* EXPECT BETRAYAL.
FIRST THE VILLARD WOMAN MUST BE DEALT WITH. BUT ONCE THAT'S ACCOMPLISHED, THESE FOOL MASTERS AND THEIR SPIRITS ARE GOING TO **SUFFER.**
AND WHEN THIS PLANET IS MINE, I'LL USE IT TO—

ANIMORA.
I TRUST YOU REMEMBER ME?
INGRA DIDN'T WASTE ANY TIME SENDING HER TOY TO LOOK AFTER ME, DID SHE?
YOU *WERE* HER FAVORITE.
*ONCE*, PERHAPS.
BUT I FELL FROM FAVOR LONG AGO. THIS IS THE SCRAP SHE THROWS ME.
AND I VERY MUCH DOUBT INGRA'S AWARE OF YOUR NEWFOUND FREEDOM.
*I* CERTAINLY DIDN'T TELL HER.
MY PRESENCE ON THIS DREARY MOTE *IS* AT INGRA'S REQUEST. BUT NOT BECAUSE OF YOU.
HERE, I CALL MYSELF DARROW. I'M TO SWAY THE VILLARD WOMAN WHO BEARS THE SIGIL OF POWER.
I BELIEVE *YOU* HAVE A CERTAIN INTEREST IN HER AS WELL.
COINCIDENCE IS A CURIOUS THING, IS IT NOT?

IF YOU DO SERVE INGRA...
...WHY SEEK ME OUT? I'M SURE YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN OUR...
...DALLIANCE.
CALL IT WHAT IT WAS, ANIMORA.
YOU USED ME.
BUT THEN SO DID INGRA. AND SHE CONTINUES TO DO SO NOW.
IN A WAY, I'M JUST AS MUCH AN EXILE AS YOU ARE.
AN EXILE FOR THE MOMENT.
THIS WORLD IS RIFE WITH ENERGIES. CONQUERING IT IS MERELY A STEPPING STONE.
I WILL RETURN TO ELYSIA AND HAVE MY REVENGE UPON THAT WITCH.
FOR BANISHING ME.
FOR TURNING ME INTO THIS.
WE WERE CLOSE ONCE, YOU AND I. I SEEM TO REMEMBER THAT TIME FONDLY.
I'M INTIMATELY FAMILIAR WITH GISELLE VILLARD. SHE'S POWERFUL. TRUTHFULLY, SHE HAS YET TO REALIZE HOW POWERFUL.
MY ASSISTANCE COULD PROVE EXTREMELY USEFUL IN WHAT'S TO COME.
YOU'D TURN YOUR BACK ON THE FIRST?
I'D LIKE NOTHING BETTER THAN TO SEE INGRA BROUGHT DOWN.
TO SEE ALL OF THEM BROUGHT DOWN.
SO I BELIEVE I'M BEST SERVED...

BY SERVING YOU.